

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 THE HAGUE 003008

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [KISL](#) [NL](#) [KPAO](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/EXTREMISM: MOHAMMAD B'S NEIGHBORHOOD

THIS CABLE IS SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: Overtoomseveld is a Moroccan neighborhood in Western Amsterdam, made notorious on November 2, 2004 when native son Mohammed Bouyeri murdered filmmaker Theo van Gogh on an Amsterdam street in broad daylight. One year later, it remains a largely segregated community, in many ways more Arab than Dutch. Over the last year, Embassy and Consulate officials visited this economically depressed neighborhood several times and established contacts with local Muslim and non-Muslim residents, at least one of whom knew Bouyeri prior to the murder. Despite local police and community outreach programs, Dutch authorities worry that Muslim minority youth in segregated neighborhoods like Overtoomseveld remain prime targets for recruitment by Islamic extremist groups because of their alienation from broader Dutch society and limited economic opportunities. END SUMMARY.

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD  
-----

2.(SBU) Overtoomseveld in West Amsterdam is a neighborhood of approximately 8,000 residents. It lies just outside Amsterdam's ring motorway, but only a ten-minute bike-ride from the down-town area. In contrast to the 18th and 19th century buildings on the other side of the ring, housing in Overtoomseveld consists primarily of concrete, prefabricated apartment blocs built during the 1960's and 70's to provide housing for low-income Dutch families.

3.(SBU) Until the 1980s the neighborhood was almost exclusively white, working-class Dutch. According to local contacts, however, about 80 percent of the residents of Overtoomseveld today are non-indigenous Dutch (allochtonen) of Moroccan or other Arab descent. As Moroccan immigrants gradually moved in, many white families with the economic means to do so moved to single-family houses in other parts of the city or in the more distant suburbs.

4.(SBU) The Muslim character of Overtoomseveld is immediately apparent to the casual visitor. Women are more visible on balconies (usually with small children) than on the street, and nearly all wear headscarves. Arabic language shop-window signs and graffiti -- much of it anti-American -- are common.

THE DISH AND THE MINARET  
-----

5.(SBU) Although fairly tidy by U.S. standards, Overtoomseveld is considered run-down by the immaculate Dutch. There is more litter and graffiti than in other parts of the city, and properties, usually owned by absentee landlords, show signs of neglect such as broken windows and stoops. Within Amsterdam's Moroccan community, it is common for large extended families to share small rental apartments, creating additional strains on the poorly constructed structures. The government subsidizes most of the council housing in the neighborhood, and is a significant source of income through the provision of unemployment, rent support and social welfare benefits.

6.(SBU) The large number of satellite dishes, used to beam in Arabic stations such as al Jazeera, have earned Overtoomseveld the derogatory sobriquet of a dish city in Dutch. Satellite television is cheaper than Dutch cable and provides a direct link to the home cultures of many immigrants, but many non-immigrant Dutch criticize the prevalence of satellite broadcasting as insulating immigrant communities from mainstream Dutch culture and encouraging segregation.

7.(SBU) The neighborhood's one Moroccan mosque plays a critical role in satisfying residents' spiritual and cultural needs. When Emboff visited the mosque during the middle of the afternoon, there were about 20 middle-aged men inside. One English speaker graciously offered a tour around the mosque. The mosque has a food store and classrooms for the 100 children aged 6-12 attending Arabic and Koran classes on weekends. Like elsewhere in the Netherlands, the imam speaks little Dutch and was imported

from Morocco. On Fridays, the mosque has an overflow capacity and worshippers spill into the streets for prayers. The imam has a cordial relationship with local police -- there is a police station next door -- and has cooperated with police requests to disperse worshippers quickly after prayers to avoid congestion.

#### THE PROBLEM OF YOUTH

8.(SBU) During non-school hours, groups of young men and boys hang out on the neighborhood's streets and stoops with little to do. As a result, incidents of petty crime and vandalism are high. During a recent visit by Emboffs, several groups of young boys were gathered outside two neighborhood internet cafes. According to local contacts, one of these cafes -- across from a police station -- had earlier been used by members of the extremist Hofstad group, including Bouyeri. Local police regularly drop in on these cafes and report seeing Arabic websites being accessed; few have the language skills, however, to determine what sort of information is being shared.

9.(SBU) Neighborhood youth are also active graffiti artists; when the Consul General and emboffs toured the neighborhood in late September, graffiti on apartment buildings included obscenities against President Bush, adoration for Saddam Hussein and several HAMAS-related displays. According to police contacts, local police are now trained to monitor amounts and types of graffiti as signs of radicalism.

10.(SBU) In 1998, riots between Moroccan youth and Dutch police in several cities soured already bad relations between the two groups. In response, a number of community initiatives were launched, such as the establishment of police Youth Coordinators in various neighborhoods to enhance dialogue between the police and Moroccan youth. While the focus of these efforts originally was to reduce petty crime, it has now shifted to combating radicalization. The neighborhood watch group, Neighborhood Fathers, is another organization established to reduce crime that has now taken on a counter-extremism focus.

#### REACHING OUT TO RADICALS

11.(SBU) According to Amsterdam West Youth Coordinator Tom Smakman, Overtoomseveld is not the toughest neighborhood in Amsterdam, but it is the most likely to produce radicals. Smakman claimed this was because of the density of the population and the level of poverty among its residents: People know that there are a lot of frustrated youths in this neighborhood. He stressed that police are less worried about what takes place on the streets -- which they can monitor -- than about what goes on behind closed doors. According to Smakman, radical views are more widespread than ever among local youth, many of whom consider Bouyeri a hero. Many youth, however, will not express their feelings openly in public or in the presence of their parents, who largely reject such views. However, Smakman added, We don't know what happens when the drapes are shut.

12.(SBU) Smakman speaks from experience, having come into contact with Mohammed Bouyeri and other Hofstad group members through his efforts to reach out to community groups. Bouyeri, for example, was temporarily on the editorial staff of a Dutch/Turkish/Arabic neighborhood newspaper co-sponsored by local police and a neighborhood organization to promote employment among local youth. According to Smakman, Bouyeri was known for his columns encouraging youth to empower themselves to achieve success in Dutch society. Smakman noted that Bouyeri's transformation from integration proponent to extremist murderer was surprisingly sudden, but there were signs -- such as when Bouyeri refused to shake the hand of his longtime friend one day without explanation.

13.(SBU) Another Hofstad suspect now awaiting trial, Yusef Etoumi, participated in 2000 in a three-week summer program for high-risk Dutch-Moroccan youth to perform service projects in Morocco. The program, entitled And Now Something Positive, was another initiative launched to improve inter-community relations following the 1998 riots and is sponsored by several Dutch companies. Smakman, who took part in the trip as a chaperone, remembered Etoumi as a quiet kid, not a criminal boy who engaged in soft drug use.

#### COMMENT

14.(SBU) Overtoomseveld lived up to its radical reputation two weeks ago when additional arrests of several alleged Hofstad Group members were made there. Despite many community programs and active involvement by the police and residents over the last few years, young people, especially

young men, in this neighborhood continue to feel excluded from society and trapped in segregated communities that provide no solid social identity. Dutch authorities worry that such youth are vulnerable to the allure of an Islamic extremist message that promises to give them a sense of belonging and empowerment. One year after the murder of van Gogh, however, the Dutch government still has no good plan for preventing the emergence of new Mohammed Bouyeris from the same mean streets. END COMMENT.

BLAKEMAN